

A RESPONSE TO THE 21ST CENTURY SCIENCE COALITION STANDARDS OF SCIENCE EDUCATION

Will Brooks, Ph.D. and Joe Deweese, Ph.D.

[**EDITOR'S NOTE:** The following article was written by two A.P. auxiliary staff scientists. Dr. Brooks holds a Ph.D. in Cell Biology from the University of Alabama at Birmingham. Dr. Deweese holds a Ph.D. in Biochemistry from Vanderbilt University.]

Lines have been drawn and sides have been taken in Texas as scientists and educators battle with one another over whether the weaknesses in evolutionary theory should be taught in the public school system. Since 1998, the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) curriculum for the sciences has remained unchanged. Now, 11 years later, revisions and updates are being made regarding many points within this curriculum, including how evolutionary biology should be taught in the public school system. The 1998 TEKS for high school reads:

The student knows the theory of biological evolution. The student is expected to: (A) identify evidence of change in species using fossils, DNA sequences, anatomical similarities, physiological similarities, and embryology; and (B) illustrate the results of natural selection in speciation, diversity, phylogeny, adaptation, behavior, and extinction ("Comparison of Current...", 2009).

A few points can quickly be drawn from this excerpt. First, the opening sentence states that students are expected to know the theory of evolution. It does not state or even directly imply that evolution is the single true explanation for the origin of life. Second, nowhere in the statement or the remainder of the 1998 TEKS are students indoctrinated with the idea that evolution is scientific law; although, students are still expected to recognize that

similarities among different species are evidence of change rather than a common creator. For 11 years, the above standard for biological education has guided middle and high school teachers in their pursuit to educate young minds. But now, evolutionists have made dramatic pushes to change what was once taught as an alleged explanation for life into nothing short of fact.

In support of the proposed changes to TEKS, the 21st Century Science Coalition has formulated five principles that they believe must be adopted into the Texas science curriculum. The Coalition's Web site reads: "We will not allow politics and ideology to handicap the future of our children with a 19th-century education in their 21st-century classroom" ("Welcome," 2009). The five principles are:

Scientifically sound curriculum standards must:

1. acknowledge that instruction on evolution is **vital** to understanding all the biological sciences;
2. make clear that **evolution is an easily observable phenomenon** that has been documented **beyond any reasonable doubt**;
3. be based on the latest, peer-reviewed scholarship;
4. encourage valid critical thinking and scientific reasoning by **leaving out all references to 'strengths and weaknesses,'** which politicians have used to introduce supernatural explanations into science courses; and
5. recognize that all students are best served when **matters of faith are left to families and houses of**

worship ("Scientist Statement," 2009, emp. added).

As of the writing of this article, over 600 men and women who currently hold faculty positions at Texas colleges and universities have signed a petition in favor of implementing these standards into Texas public school curricula. The signers include faculty members from several universities affiliated in some way with Christianity, including Baylor, Texas Christian, and Abilene Christian, among others. By signing the petition, these men and women are indicating a personal conviction that evolution is essentially scientific law and believe it should be

CONTENTS

ARTICLES

- A Response to The 21st Century Science Coalition Standards of Science Education*
Will Brooks, Ph.D. and
Joe Deweese, Ph.D. 41
- The Problem of Evil*
Kyle Butt, M.A. and Dave Miller, Ph.D. . . 44

DEPARTMENTS

- Speaking Schedules 45
- Note from the Editor
- A.P. Study Courses 48

RESOURCES

- Iowa's Same-Sex Marriage Decision 21-R
- Q&A 24-R

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taught as fact to middle and high school students. Further, they intend to remove from the classroom any and all references to the weaknesses of the evolutionary hypothesis. In effect, this petition and its signers are attempting to force onto unsuspecting youths an unproven idea as pure, clear fact.

The principles endorsed by the Coalition manifest several flaws. First, the Coalition claimed that “evolution is vital to understanding all the biological sciences” (“Scientist Statement”). This echoes the modern push for evolutionary thought to permeate all areas of science. By interpreting all things in terms of an evolutionary history, the influence of evolution becomes widespread—particularly in the biological sciences. However, there is **nothing** about biological science that **requires** macroevolutionary explanations (see discussion of macroevolution below). In fact, **science** can be taught without invoking macroevolution—despite what we are bullied into thinking. The biochemical, structural, developmental, and functional similarities between organisms can be explained in terms of a common Designer without the need for common descent. Both authors acknowledge that their own research in biochemistry and molecular biology is conducted without consideration of macroevolution with absolutely no detriment to its quality or its conclusions. So, biology can be understood—even researched—without

requiring a context of Darwinian macroevolution. In fact, postulating common design by a Designer is a more effective working model than assuming biological structures are the result of accidental, random processes.

Second, the Coalition wants to “make clear that evolution is an easily observable phenomenon that has been documented beyond any reasonable doubt” (“Scientist Statement”). This is a very misleading statement. By using the common term “evolution,” the authors avoid clearly defining what the “easily observable phenomena” are and claim the evidence is “beyond any reasonable doubt.” (Of course, the implication is that if **you** doubt it—you obviously are not reasonable). This is a frequent tactic of those who would like us to assume that “all” evolution is the same.

Interestingly, the Coalition did not acknowledge the difference between **microevolution** (changes at or below species level using existing genetic information) and **macroevolution** (large-scale changes requiring new genetic information, taking place over long periods of time) in their statement. Some claim that creationists invented these terms, but they are commonly used in the scientific literature and textbooks (e.g., Erwin, 2000; Starr, 2006). While microevolution is an “easily observable phenomenon” and well documented, macroevolution is not. The term “evolution” is routinely used to refer to the combination of the two processes, and

this quickly leads to misunderstanding, because while microevolution is clearly documented, the same cannot be said for macroevolution. It has been assumed by some evolutionists that the mechanisms responsible for microevolution could account for macroevolution given enough time (e.g., Erwin, 2000). However, there is much disagreement on this point. The development of new organisms requires more than changes in existing genetic information—it requires the generation of new information altogether in order to form new organs and body structures. **There is no known mechanism for the spontaneous generation of new information.** [NOTE: There are mutagenic processes which result in random insertions, deletions, duplications, and rearrangements. But these undirected events are typically deleterious and always insufficient for generating the information needed for macroevolution.] The situation is far more complex than the Coalition’s second statement implies.

Third, there is no argument about whether education should be based on peer-reviewed scholarship. However, there probably would be disagreement over the definition of “scholarship.” The modern “peer-review” process is not without bias. Searches of manuscript databases display a marked bias against questioning Neo-Darwinism. We completely agree that students should be kept current on the latest science, but we must remember that teaching biological science is distinct from teaching about evolution.

Fourth, the Coalition wants to change a statement in the 1998 TEKS standards calling for students in science to “analyze, review, and critique scientific explanations, including hypotheses and theories, as to their **strengths and weaknesses** using scientific evidence and information,” to “analyze and evaluate scientific explanations using empirical evidence, logical reasoning, and experimental and observational testing” (“Comparison of Current...,” 2009, emp. added). It is argued that language mentioning “strengths and weaknesses” can be used to “introduce supernatural explanations” (“Scientist Statement”). It is interesting that this change is intended to “encourage **valid** critical thinking and scientific reasoning.” So, are we to assume that valid critical thinking excludes taking account of the strengths and weaknesses of a given theory or hypothesis? In our scientific training as graduate students in the biological sci-

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ences, we were routinely encouraged to be skeptical and to question existing ideas and conclusions. This proposed change does not reflect the type of critical thinking we expect of graduate students. Why is the Coalition afraid of leaving theories open to question?

Fifth, the Coalition's effort to ban all religious ideas from the classroom is actually a veiled attempt to dismiss the possibility of a Creator as a rational explanation of life and to keep students from analyzing the faults of evolutionary theory. Their desire to teach children that life originated via evolution goes beyond science into the realm of subjective beliefs—beliefs that cannot be tested or validated scientifically. We are told, “science must be taught in a science class”—which is precisely what those of us who believe in the Creator do—we teach **science** in our science classrooms. The fact is that the Universe and even life must have had a Cause and cannot be explained by “natural” means.

What effect would these proposed standards have on education? Young minds are very pliable. When scientists holding Ph.D.s in biology claim certain theories as fact, young minds are very likely to believe that those theories are, indeed, fact. And, why shouldn't they? When the most educated, best-trained men and women speak, many teenagers cannot but listen and assume truth is being conveyed. The problem with making unsubstantiated statements (such as “evolution...has been documented beyond any reasonable doubt”) is that such statements inherently exclude alternate explanations for the origin of life. The Coalition conveniently ignores the fact that **hundreds of credentialed scientists are skeptical of evolution**. Proponents of evolutionary theory have bullied their explanation for life's origin into education to the exclusion of all other explanations. They use propaganda techniques to indoctrinate young minds early in order to perpetuate this ill-conceived idea.

Science education has always been a two-faceted approach. On one side, students are taught facts, equations, and principles that research has shown to be true. For example, physics equations regarding force and acceleration (e.g., $F=ma$), proven biological facts such as that DNA is the genetic material, and universal principles such as that energy can be neither destroyed nor created. The other, equally important aspect of

science education is instruction in the scientific method and critical analysis of information. This second facet of education has traditionally been applied in the laboratory, where students conduct experiments and evaluate their results. Both the learning of information and the development of critical thinking skills are fundamental to education at levels of both secondary and higher education. One vital component to the critical evaluation of data is the analysis of **both its strengths and weaknesses**. If weaknesses in data were ignored, untold numbers of incorrect scientific ideas would have been propagated over the years. The Coalition is in favor of removing discussion of strengths and weaknesses of evolutionary biology from the classroom. This very idea is in stark contrast to the scientific method and the principle of critical evaluation. If this standard is put into effect, it would undermine an educator's ability to teach these aspects of science to the students. In order to properly train students, they must be allowed to use their minds, to weigh the positive and negative data, to analyze, and to think for themselves.

CONCLUSION

The 21st Century Science Coalition is not the only voice in this fight. Texans for Better Science Education is offering an alternative to the changes recommended by the Coalition (Texans for Better..., 2009). Furthermore, hundreds of scientists from universities around the world have signed Discovery Institute's “Dissent from Darwinism” which states, “We are skeptical of claims for the ability of random mutation and natural selection to account for the complexity of life. Careful examination of the evidence for Darwinian theory should be encouraged” (“A Scientific Dissent...,” 2009). Contrary to the opinion of the Coalition, there are many scientists who recognize the **failure** of Darwinism to explain the “origin of species” (and the origin of life!).

On March 27, 2009, the Texas State Board of Education approved a final draft of changes to the TEKS, which will be implemented with the 2010-2011 academic year. Who won the battle is still a matter of debate. The new TEKS, which can be accessed through the Texas Education Agency's Web site, reads:

In all fields of science, analyze, evaluate, and critique scientific explanations by using empirical evidence, logical

reasoning, and experimental and observational testing, including examining all sides of scientific evidence of those scientific explanations, so as to encourage critical thinking by the student (“Texas Essential...,” 2009).

Noticeably, the terms “strengths and weaknesses” do not appear in the new curriculum standards. However, the phrase “examining all sides of scientific evidence” was included. It appears that Texas education officials have attempted to keep both sides happy by straddling the fence on this issue. In another excerpt regarding the changes in Earth's atmosphere, the phrase “that could have occurred” was added to produce the following final statement:

Analyze the changes of Earth's atmosphere **that could have occurred** through time from the original hydrogen-helium atmosphere, the carbon dioxide-water vapor-methane atmosphere, and the current nitrogen-oxygen atmosphere (“Texas Essential...,” 2009, emp. added).

We may never know the true motivations for these changes—political, scientific, or other—but whatever the reasons, educators are left with this manuscript, the 2009 TEKS, to guide their curricula in the sciences.

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The Problem of Evil

Kyle Butt, M.A. and Dave Miller, Ph.D.

On February 12, 2009, in a debate with Kyle Butt, Dan Barker affirmed the proposition that the God of the Bible does not exist. Three minutes and 15 seconds into his opening speech, he stated that one reason he believes God does not exist is because “there are no good replies to the arguments against the existence of God, such as the problem of evil. All you have to do is walk into any children’s hospital and you know there is no God. Prayer doesn’t make any difference. Those people pray for their beloved children to live, and they die” (Butt and Barker, 2009). Barker suggested that “the problem of evil” is one of the strongest positive arguments against the existence of God.

What, precisely, is the so-called “problem of evil”? Atheists like Barker note that the Bible depicts God as all-loving as well as all-powerful. This observation is certainly correct (e.g., 1 John 4:8; Genesis 17:1; Job 42:2; Matthew 19:26). Yet everyone admits that evil exists in the world. For God to allow evil and suffering either implies that He is not all-loving, or if He is all-loving, He lacks the power to eliminate them. In either case, the God of the Bible would not exist. To phrase the “problem of evil” more precisely, the atheist contends that the biblical theist cannot consistently affirm all three of the following propositions:

God is omnipotent.

God is perfect in goodness.

Evil exists.

Again, the atheist insists that if God is omnipotent (as the Bible affirms), He is not perfect in goodness since He permits evil and suffering to run rampant in the world. If, on the other hand, He is perfect in goodness, He lacks omnipotence since His goodness would move Him to exercise His power to eliminate evil on the Earth. Since the Christian affirms all three of the propositions, the atheist claims that Christians are guilty of affirming a logical contradiction, mak-

ing their position false. Supposedly, the “problem of evil” presents an insurmountable problem for the Christian theist.

In truth, however, the “problem of evil” is a problem for the atheist—not the Christian theist. First, atheistic philosophy cannot provide a definition of “evil.” There is no rational way that atheism can accurately label anything as “evil” or “good.” On February 12, 1998, William Provine, a professor in the Department of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology at the distinguished Cornell University, delivered the keynote address at the second annual Darwin Day. In an abstract of that speech on the Darwin Day Web site, Dr. Provine asserted: “Naturalistic evolution has clear consequences that Charles Darwin understood perfectly. 1) No gods worth having exist; 2) no life after death exists; 3) **no ultimate foundation for ethics exists**; 4) no ultimate meaning in life exists; and 5) human free will is nonexistent” (Provine, 1998, emp. added). Provine’s ensuing message centered on his fifth statement regarding human free will. Prior to delving into the “meat” of his message, however, he noted: “The first 4 implications are so obvious to modern naturalistic evolutionists that I will spend little time defending them” (1998, emp. added). If there is no foundation upon which to base any ethical conclusions, then how could an atheist label any action or occurrence as “evil,” “bad,” or “wrong”?

Frederick Nietzsche understood atheistic philosophy so well that he suggested that the bulk of humanity has misunderstood concepts such as “evil” and “good.” In his work *Beyond Good and Evil*, Nietzsche wrote: “We believe that severity, violence, slavery, danger in the street and in the heart, secrecy, stoicism, tempter’s art and devilry of every kind—that everything wicked, terrible, tyrannical, predatory, and serpentine in man, **serves as well for the elevation of the human species as its opposite**” (2007,

p. 35, emp. added). Nietzsche’s point simply was that what we might call morally “evil,” actually helps humans evolve higher thinking capacities, quicker reflexes, or greater problem-solving skills. Thus, if an “evil” occurrence helps humanity “evolve,” then there can be no legitimate grounds for labeling that occurrence as “evil.” In fact, according to atheistic evolution, anything that furthers the human species should be deemed as “good.”

As C.S. Lewis made his journey from atheism to theism, he realized that the “problem of evil” presented more of a problem for atheism than it did for theism. He stated:

My argument against God was that the universe seemed so cruel and unjust. But how had I got this idea of *just* and *unjust*? A man does not call a line crooked unless he has some idea of a straight line. What was I comparing this universe with when I called it unjust...? Of course, I could have given up my idea of justice by saying it was nothing but a private idea of my own. But if I did that, then my argument against God collapsed too—for the argument depended on saying that the world was really unjust, not simply that it did not happen to please my private fancies. Thus in the very act of trying to prove that God did not exist—in other words, that the whole of reality was senseless—I found I was forced to assume that one part of reality—namely my idea of justice—was full of sense. Consequently, atheism turns out to be too simple (Lewis, 1952, p. 45-46, italics in orig.).

Theistic apologist, William Lane Craig, has summarized the issue quite well:

I think that evil, paradoxically, actually proves the existence of God. My argument would go like this: If God does not exist then objective moral values do not exist. (2) Evil exists, (3) therefore objective moral values exist, that is to say, some things are really evil. Therefore, God exists. Thus, although evil and suffering at one level seem to call into question God’s existence, on a deeper more fundamen-



The Meaning of Iowa's Same-Sex "Marriage" Decision

Matt Vega, J.D.

[Editor's Note: The following article was written by A.P. staff writer Matt Vega, who received his doctorate from Yale University Law School.]

On April 3, 2009, the Iowa Supreme Court unanimously held in *Varnum v. Brien* that a state law limiting marriage to between a man and a woman amounts to treating gays as second class citizens. The lawsuit was originally filed in 2005 by the New York-based gay rights organization, Lambda Legal, on behalf of six gay and lesbian couples in Iowa who demanded that Polk County issue official "marriage" licenses for their same-sex relationships. The district court decided in favor of the couples, and the county registrar, Timothy J. Brien, appealed the decision to Iowa's highest court, which affirmed the lower court's decision (*Varnum v. Brien*, 2009).

Iowa is not the only state to embrace same-sex marriage. Massachusetts was the first to legalize same-sex marriage (*Goodridge v. Public Department of Health*, 2003), and Connecticut quickly followed suit (*Kerrigan v. Comm'r of Pub. Health*, 2008). California, which briefly allowed same-sex marriage before a voter initiative in November 2008 repealed it, allows "domestic partnerships," as does Oregon and Washington, D.C. ("State Constitutional Law...", 2009, 122:1557ff.). In 2007, New Jersey began providing the equivalent of spousal rights to same-sex "civil unions," leading New Hampshire to do the same in 2008. Although same-sex couples cannot marry in New York, the state recognizes valid same-sex marriages from other jurisdictions. Other states, including Washington, Hawaii, and Maryland, provide limited spousal rights to same-sex couples ("Marriage Equality...", 2009).

However, some believe that a decision constitutionalizing same-sex "marriage" in a "heartland" state like Iowa suggests homosexuality is gaining wider acceptance in mainstream America. Over the last 60 days, the Iowa decision has emboldened Vermont, New Hampshire, and Washington to upgrade their "civil unions" or "domestic partnership" laws to allow full same-sex "marriage" rights. On May 6, Maine's Governor John Baldacci signed "marriage equality" legislation that is scheduled to become effective in mid-September 2009. On the same day, Washington, D.C. Mayor Adrian Fenty signed a bill passed by the D.C. council 12-1 to recognize marriages by same-sex couples legally entered into in other jurisdictions. The D.C. bill will now be sent to Congress for a 30 legislative day review period, but opponents of the bill are not expected to line up enough votes in the Democratic controlled House or Senate to overturn the bill through the regular disapproval process.

The Iowa decision purports to be based solely on the Equal Protection Clause of the state consti-

tution. The court held that laws that classify people based on their sexual orientation cannot survive "intermediate scrutiny" (a legal term of art) for two reasons. First, the court found it troubling to treat people differently based on their sexual orientation because the characteristic is so "highly resistant to change." While the court admitted there is no definitive scientific evidence that a person is born homosexual, it surmised it can be difficult and even damaging to an individual's "sense of self" to change their sexual orientation.

Second, the court insisted on heightened protection for homosexuals because they lack political power. The court reached this decision despite the fact that Iowa has a number of laws on the books protecting homosexuals (see *Iowa Code*, 729A; NOTE: In conjunction with other general state laws, the Iowa Code prohibits discrimination in the areas of housing, employment, public accommodation, credit and education as well as assault, criminal mischief, trespass, arson or intimidation by threat of violence because of a person's sexual orientation). The court even went so far as to hold that new legislation to create a "civil union" equivalent for same-sex couples would be equally suspect even if it afforded them all or substantially all of the same rights and privileges as married heterosexual couples in Iowa. The Court suggested the mere distinction in terminology between a civil union and marriage would be difficult to square with equal protection.

The County offered several justifications for a state law reserving the term "marriage" for the conjugal relationship between a man and a woman, but to no avail. For example, the County contended that heterosexual marriage has a special status in the law because it provides the "optimal environment" for rearing children. However, the court held the County's evidence was "unsupported by reliable scientific studies" and failed to demonstrate how the legislation "substantially" furthered any of the state's objectives.

The decision, which went into effect on April 25, has had an immediate impact. The language banning same-sex marriage was deemed stricken from the Iowa Code. Accordingly, a gay and lesbian couple can now legally obtain a marriage license at any Iowa courthouse, not just in Polk County, and dozens of couples have already done so. Opponents of the decision plan to seek a state constitutional amendment. If they do, it will be a long, uphill battle requiring approval by both legislative bodies and a public vote.

Sometimes our courts suffer a sort of spiritual asphyxia because they attempt to make decisions in a vacuum, based on morally-neutral grounds, such as "what does the law say" or "what works best." The Iowa Supreme Court specifically held "civil marriage must be judged under our constitutional standards of equal protection and not under



religious doctrines or the religious views of individuals.” However, the nature of marriage is one of those inherently moral questions that require the application of God-given moral reason and revelation. According to the Bible, the two-in-one-flesh relationship was designed by God to be between one man and one woman for life (Genesis 2:18-24; Matthew 19:5-6). Americans are undoubtedly aware of this fundamental truth; therefore, we are “without excuse” (Romans 2:20) when we deviate from that original blueprint. If our courts are unwilling or unable to make the right moral judgment, it is incumbent on our legislatures and citizenry to take the legal steps necessary to bring the law back in line with God’s plan for marriage. Let it not be said of us as a nation, “And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done” (Romans 2:24, ESV).

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QUESTION & ANSWER

Q Did Adam and Eve know of good and evil prior to sinning? It was only after Adam and Eve ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil that the Bible says they came “to know good and evil” (Genesis 3:5,22). How could God punish them for an evil action if they did not know what evil was?

A Consider a hypothetical situation: What if two godly parents living in the most wicked city in the world chose never to let their children out of their house. They gave them everything they needed for survival inside the house. They filled their home with only good things. Their children never saw evil on television, heard of it on the radio, nor read of it in books. The children could play in any room in the house and open any door, **except** they had been forbidden to open the front door that leads to “Sodom and Gomorrah.” Do these children know what they can do and cannot do? Yes. Have they seen, witnessed, or experienced the evil outside their house (and compared that evil to the good within their own house)? No. Everything in their house was good. They had the freedom to do any number of things within their own house. They were forbidden to do one thing: open the front door. Did they know they were not supposed to open the front door? Yes. But did they **know** of the evil on the other side? No. They had never seen it, heard it, thought it, or experienced it.

The term “know” (Hebrew *yada*, Greek *ginosko*) or one of its derivatives (i.e., knew, known, etc.) is used in Scripture in a variety of ways. Several times it refers to a man and woman having sexual intercourse (Genesis 4:1,17,25; Judges 11:39; 19:25).

Jesus used the term to refer to His regard for His sheep (i.e., people—John 10:27). In contrast to the way of the wicked that will perish, the psalmist wrote that God “knows” (i.e., approves, takes delight in, etc.) the way of the righteous (Psalm 1:6). Paul used the term “know” in Ephesians 3:19 in the sense of knowing “experimentally what intellectually is beyond our powers of knowing”—the love of Christ (Jamieson, 1997). The fact is, like so many other words in Scripture (and in modern times) the word “know” has a variety of meanings.

When Adam and Eve were in the Garden of Eden everything was “very good” (Genesis 1:31). They had the freedom to eat of “of every tree of the garden” (2:16), but were forbidden to eat of the fruit of one of them (2:17). They **knew** of God’s good creation and they **knew** that if they ate of “the tree of the knowledge of good and evil” (the one forbidden tree), God said they would die (3:2-3). However, it was not until after they ate of the forbidden tree that they actually “knew” (**experienced**) evil. Thus, in one sense Adam and Eve did know the difference between right and wrong, good and evil (they knew what they should and should not do; they understood moral distinctions), but they did not know of good and evil experientially until after their disobedience.

Eric Lyons

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tal level, they actually prove God's existence (n.d.).

Craig and Lewis are correct. If evil actually exists in the world, and some things are not the way they "should" be, then there must be a standard outside of the natural world that would give meaning to the terms "evil" and "good"—and the atheistic assumption proves false.

AN EMOTIONAL APPEAL

In addition to the fact that "evil" cannot even be discussed without reference to God, Barker rested the force of his statement on an emotional appeal. He said: "All you have to do is walk into any children's hospital and you know there is no God." Is it really the case that anyone who walks into a children's hospital is immediately struck by the overwhelming force of atheism? No, it is not true. In fact, it is the farthest thing from the truth. Anticipating Barker's tactics, one of us [KB] visited the children's hospital in Columbia, South Carolina and met a lady who volunteered there. When asked why she volunteered, she pointed to a bullet hole in her skull. She said that it was a blessing she was still alive and she wanted to give something back since God had allowed her to live. When asked if many of the volunteers in the hospital were religious, she responded that many of them were from churches in the area, i.e., churches that believe in the God of the Bible.

According to Barker's "line of reasoning," the lady with whom we talked

should not believe in a loving God, the volunteers that gave their time to the hospital should not believe in a loving God, we should no longer believe in a loving God (since we walked through the hospital), nor should any other person who has visited that facility. The falsity of such reasoning is apparent. Seeing the suffering in a children's hospital does not necessarily drive a person to atheism. Truth be told, most people who visit a children's hospital, and even have children who are patients there, believe in the God of the Bible. Barker's assertion does not stand up to rational criticism.

Furthermore, Barker's emotional appeal can easily be turned on its head: Walk through any children's hospital and observe the love, care, and concern that the parents, doctors, and volunteers show the children, and you know atheistic evolution cannot be true. After all, evolution is about the survival of the fittest, in which the strong struggle against the weak to survive in a never-ending contest to pass on their genes. If evolution were true, parents and doctors would not waste their valuable resources on children who will not pass on their genes. Only theism can account for the selfless devotion and care that you see in children's hospitals.

SOME SUFFERING IS ACCEPTABLE

When the "problem of evil" is presented, it quickly becomes apparent that the term "evil" cannot be used

in any meaningful way by an atheist. The tactic, therefore, is to swap the terms "suffering," "pain," or "harm" for the word "evil," and contend that the world is filled with too much pain, harm, and suffering. Since it is evident that countless people suffer physical, emotional, and psychological harm, the atheist contends that, even though there is no real "evil," a loving God would not allow such suffering. [NOTE: The atheist's argument has not really changed. He is still contending that suffering is "bad" or "evil" and would not be present in a "good" world. In truth, he remains in the same dilemma of proving that evil exists and that suffering is objectively evil.]

At first glance, it seems that the atheist is claiming that a loving, moral God would not allow His creatures, the objects of His love, to suffer **at all**. Again, the atheist reasons that humans are supposed to be the objects of God's love, yet they suffer. Thus, God does not love or does not have the power to stop the suffering—and therefore does not exist.

The thoughtful observer soon sees the problem with this line of reasoning, which even the skeptic is forced to admit: it is morally right to allow some suffering in order to bring about greater good. On numerous occasions, Dan Barker and his fellow atheists have admitted the validity of this truth. During the cross-examination period of the *Butt/Barker Debate*, Barker stated:

You can't get through life without some harm.... I think we all agree that it is wrong to stick a needle into a baby. That's horrible. But, if that baby needs a life-saving injection, we will cause that harm, we will do that. The baby won't understand it, but we will do that **because there is a greater good**. So, humanistic morality understands that within certain situations, there is harm, and there's a trade off of values (Butt and Barker, 2009, emp. added).

In his debate with Peter Payne, Barker stated: "Often ethics involves creating harm. **Sometimes harm is good**" (Barker and Payne, 2005, emp. added). In his book, *Maybe Right, Maybe Wrong: A Guide for Young Thinkers*, Barker wrote: "When possible, you should try to stop the pain of others. **If you have to hurt someone**, then hurt them as little as possible.... If you do have to hurt someone, then try

SPEAKING SCHEDULES

Kyle Butt

June 3	Jacksonville, AL	(256) 435-9356
June 10	Decatur, AL	(256) 353-1876
June 12-14	Oletha, KS	(815) 435-1541

Eric Lyons

June 3,10,17,24	Montgomery, AL	(334) 834-4019
June 14-16	Elmore, AL	(334) 567-6670
June 18-19	Hoover, AL	(205) 822-5610

Dave Miller

June 7-10	Fort Deposit, AL	(334) 227-4224
June 17	Hoover, AL	(205) 822-5610
June 19-21	Morro Bay, CA	(805) 772-7248



to stop as soon as possible. A good person does not enjoy causing pain" (1992, p. 33, emp. added).

It becomes evident that the atheist cannot argue against the concept of God based on the mere existence of suffering, because atheists are forced to admit that there can be morally justifiable reasons for suffering. Once again, the argument has been altered. No longer are we dealing with the "problem of evil," since without the concept of God, the term "evil" means nothing. Furthermore, no longer are we dealing with a "problem of suffering," since the atheist must admit that **some** suffering could be morally justifiable in order to produce a greater good. The atheist must add an additional term to qualify suffering: "pointless."

POINTLESS OR UNNECESSARY SUFFERING

Since the skeptic knows that some suffering could be morally justified, he is forced to argue against the biblical concept of God by claiming that at least some of the suffering in this world is **pointless** or unnecessary. The skeptic then maintains that any being that allows pointless suffering cannot be loving or moral. In his book *The Miracle of Theism*, J.L. Mackie noted that if the theist could legitimately show that the suffering in the world is in some way useful, then the concept of the God of the Bible "is formally possible, and its principle involves no real abandonment of our ordinary view of the opposition between good and evil" (1982, p. 154). In light of this fact, Mackie admitted: "[W]e can concede that the problem of evil does not, after all, show that the central doctrines of theism are logically inconsistent with one another" (p. 154). Did Mackie throw in the proverbial towel and admit that the "problem" of evil and suffering does not militate against God? On the contrary, he contended that even though some suffering or evil might be necessary or useful, there is far too much pointless evil (he terms it "unabsorbed evil") in the world for the traditional God of the Bible to exist. He then concluded: "The problem, therefore, now recurs as the problem of **unabsorbed evils**, and we have as yet no way of reconciling their existence with that of a god of the traditional sort"

(p. 155, emp. added). Notice how Mackie was forced to change the "problem of evil" to the "problem of **unabsorbed evil**."

Dan Barker understands this alteration in the "problem of evil" and has used it himself. In a debate with Rubel Shelly, Dan used his standard argument that the suffering in a children's hospital is enough to show God does not exist. Shelly responded with a lengthy rebuttal, bringing to light the idea that suffering in this world can be consistently reconciled with God's **purposes** for mankind. In concluding his comments, Shelly stated: "The kind of world, apparently, that unbelief wants is a world where no wrong action could have bad effects or where we just couldn't make wrong actions" (Barker and Shelly, 1999). Barker responded to Shelly's comments, saying:

I'm not asking for a world that's free of pain.... No atheist is asking that the world be changed or requiring that if there is a God, He be able to change it. I'm not asking for a world that's free of consequences. I think pain and consequences are important to a rational education.... What I am asking for is for human beings to strive as much as possible for a world that is free of **unnecessary harm** (1999, emp. added).

Barker went on to describe a scenario in which a forest fire forces a baby fawn to flee its home. In the process, the fawn catches its leg in a snare and is consumed by the flames. Barker then stated that he believed no one's soul or character was edified by the fawn's suffering, thus it would be an example of unnecessary or useless suffering. Barker further admitted that even though some suffering is acceptable, there simply is far too much to be reconciled with a loving God. Here again, it is important to notice that Barker's entire argument has been altered. It is no longer a "problem of evil (harm)" but now he has amended it to the "problem of **unnecessary evil** (harm)."

The next question that must be asked is: What would classify as "pointless," "unnecessary," or "unabsorbed" suffering? The simple answer that the atheistic position must suggest is that any suffering that **the atheist** does not deem necessary is pointless. As Timothy Keller points out, the fact is that Mackie and others use the term "pointless" to mean that they, themselves cannot see the point

of it. Keller stated: "Tucked away within the assertion that the world is filled with pointless evil is a hidden premise, namely that if evil appears pointless to me, then it must *be* pointless" (2008, p. 23, italics in orig.). Keller further noted:

This reasoning is, of course, fallacious. Just because you can't see or imagine a good reason why God might allow something to happen doesn't mean there can't be one. Again we see lurking within supposedly hard-nosed skepticism an enormous faith in one's own cognitive faculties. If our minds can't plumb the depths of the universe for good answers to suffering, well, then, there can't be any! This is blind faith of a high order (p. 23).

Indeed, it is the atheist who lives by the blind faith that he mistakenly attributes to the theist.

THE PURPOSE OF HUMAN EXISTENCE

In his monumental volume, *Have Atheists Proved There Is No God?*, philosopher Thomas B. Warren undercut completely the atheist's use of the problem of evil. He insightfully demonstrated that the Bible teaches that "God has a morally justifiable reason for having created the world...in which evil can (and does) occur" (1972, p. 16). What is that reason? God created the planet to be "the ideal environment for soul-making" (p. 16). God specifically created humans to be immortal, free moral agents, responsible for their own actions, with this earthly life being their one and only probationary period in which their eternal fate is determined by their response to God's will during earthly life (p. 19). Hence, the world "is as good (for the purpose God had in creating it) as any possible world" since it was designed to function as man's "vale of soul-making" (p. 19). The physical environment in which humans were to reside was specifically created with the necessary characteristics for achieving that central purpose. This environment would have to be so arranged that it would allow humans to be free moral agents, provide them with their basic physical needs, allow them to be challenged, and enable them to learn those things they most need to learn (p. 47).

Whereas the atheist typically defines "evil" as physical pain and suffering, the



Bible, quite logically, defines evil as violation of God's law (1 John 3:4). Observe, therefore, that **the only intrinsic evil is sin**, i.e., disobeying or transgressing the laws of God. Hence, pain and suffering are not intrinsically evil. ("[I]ntrinsic evil on the purely physical level does not exist" [p. 93]). In fact, animal pain, natural calamities, and human suffering are all necessary constituent variables in the overall environment designed for spiritual development. Such variables, for example, impress upon humans the very critical realizations that life on Earth is uncertain, precarious, and temporary. They also demonstrate that life on Earth is brief—that it will soon end (p. 58). Such realizations not only propel people to consider their spiritual condition, and the necessity of using this life to prepare for the afterlife, they prod people to contemplate God! Suffering, pain, and hardship encourage people to cultivate their spirits and to grow in moral character—acquiring virtuous attributes such as courage, patience, humility, and fortitude. Suffering can serve as discipline and motivation to spur spiritual growth and strength. It literally stimulates people to develop compassion, sympathy, love, and empathy for their fellowman (p. 81).

WHO IS IN THE BEST POSITION TO KNOW?

Since atheists cannot say that real, moral evil exists, they must adjust their objection and say that a loving God would not allow suffering. This position quickly becomes indefensible, so again the position is altered to posit that **some** suffering is morally permissible, but not pointless or unnecessary suffering. Who, then, is to determine if there truly exists unnecessary suffering that would negate the concept of God? Some atheists, such as Barker, are quick to set themselves up as the final judges who alone can set the proper limits of suffering. Yet, when those limits are analyzed, it again becomes apparent that the "problem of evil" is a legitimate problem only for the atheist.

In his book *godless*, Dan Barker stated: "There is no big mystery to morality. Morality is simply acting with the intention to minimize harm" (2008, p. 214). In his explanation about how to minimize harm, Barker wrote: "And the way

to avoid making a mistake is to try to be as informed as possible about the likely consequences of the actions being considered" (p. 214). Reasoning from Barker's comments about morality, if there truly is an omniscient God Who knows every consequence of every action that ever has been or ever will be taken, then that Being, and only that Being, would be in a position to speak with absolute authority about the amount and kind of suffering that is "necessary." Barker and his fellow atheists may object to God's tolerance for suffering, but were God to condescend to speak directly to them, He could simply respond by saying: "What you do not know is...", and He could fill in the blank with a thousand reasons about future consequences that would legitimize the suffering He allows.

Indeed, this is precisely the tact God employed with Job, when He challenged Job's knowledge and comprehension of the mysteries of the Universe:

Who is this who darkens counsel by words without knowledge? Now prepare yourself like a man; I will question you, and you shall answer Me. Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth? Tell Me, if you have understanding. Have you comprehended the breadth of the earth? Tell Me, if you know all this. Do you know it, because you were born then, or because the number of your days is great? Shall the one who contends with the Almighty correct Him? He who rebukes God, let him answer it. Would you indeed annul My judgment? Would you condemn Me that you may be justified? (Job 38:2-4, 18, 21; 40:2, 8).

God's interrogation of Job elucidated the fact of humanity's limited knowledge, especially as it relates to suffering. In contrast to this, Barker wrote:

Why should the mind of a deity—an outsider—be better able to judge human actions than the minds of humans themselves? Which mind is in a better position to make judgments about human actions and feelings? Which mind has more credibility? Which has more experience in the real world? Which mind has more of a right? (2008, p. 211).

Of course, Barker's rhetorical questions were supposed to force the reader to respond that **humans** are in a better position to understand what actions are mor-

al, or how much suffering is permissible. In light of his comments about knowing the consequences of actions, however, Barker's position falls flat. Whose mind knows more about the consequences of all actions? Whose mind is in a better position to know what will happen if this action is permitted? Whose mind has the ability to see the bigger picture? And Who alone is in the position to know how much suffering is permissible to bring about the ultimate good for humankind? That would be the infinite, eternal, omniscient Creator—the God of the Bible.

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NOTE FROM THE EDITOR

APOLOGETICS
PRESS, INC.

THE A.P. CHRISTIAN EVIDENCES STUDY COURSES

Some years ago, Apologetics Press determined to provide the public with a study course, analogous to Bible correspondence courses, but which would focus on Christian evidences. We had received requests for apologetics-based instructional material aimed specifically at men and women who are incarcerated—something that could be sent to them to help build a rock-solid, obedient faith in God, His Word, and His Son, simultaneously teaching them the Gospel plan of salvation. We also received requests for a study course in apologetics that would teach young people these same principles. We knew that these course materials would need to be attractively presented, brief, and written in a non-technical vocabulary that would be appropriate for several ages and cultural backgrounds. Hence, the Apologetics Press Christian Evidences Study Course was created.

The course actually comes in three different versions. The first is a 10-lesson, **introductory** course intended for people who would like to begin a study in Christian evidences. The second version, also in 10 lessons, is an **intermediate** course intended for people who have completed the lessons in the first course, or who simply want to study Christian evidences at a level that moves beyond introductory concepts. The third is a 10-lesson, **advanced** course for people who already have completed the first two courses, or who want to study Christian evidences at a level that moves beyond intermediate concepts. Each course has 10 eight-page lessons, each of which is printed in full color on enameled paper in a large, easy-to-read typestyle, and contains professionally drawn artwork.

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Dave Miller



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